

Ohio House Committee on Finance

April 16, 2015

Testimony of William J. Weldon Family, Parents of a Developmentally Disabled Worker

Chairman Representative Smith, Vice-Chairman Representative Schuring, Ranking Member Representative Driehaus, and Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. We are the Weldon family. My name is Bill, and this is my wife, Sue, and our son David. We appreciate the opportunity to present our concerns regarding proposed legislation that would possibly close employers such as TAC Enterprises in Springfield, Clark County Ohio.

IMPACT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

-TAC has \$4.8 million in local business contracts and \$3.2 million in government contracts. A few examples: They make and repair cargo nets for the U.S. Air Force, make computer and electronic cabinetry, create ornamental garden stones, run a hydroponic garden that sells produce to Springfield schools and local restaurants, and assemble sub-components for use in automobile seatbelt assemblies. Our son does not have exceptional fine motor skills, but he can complete about 100 of these devices each day. (My wife and I have tried, but we cannot assemble even one of these devices.) All of this is meaningful, productive work for the 300 I/DD that work at TAC.

TOO MANY COOKS

-Organizations such as DRO, Strategic Planning Leadership Group, Employment First, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities who claim to advocate for I/DD do not represent the views and experience of parents, of independent providers or of intermediate care facilities. I asked DRO if they were following their own proposals by hiring I/DD as staff in their office. I did not ask for names or types of I/DD. I only wanted numbers. They refused to answer my question and asked if I would like to file a grievance. I did and they still will not answer my question, saying that was confidential information.

-These groups that are making these proposals for change keep saying that workers in the current developmental disability programs are asking for jobs in the community. Our son is asked each year by his supervisors and mentors at TAC if he would consider a job in the community. Every year he says he wants to stay at TAC.

-TAC Enterprises may be an example of an exceptionally well run employer for I/DD, so why change it? Certainly, don't close it. Leaving TAC intact would be a fiscally sound policy with minimal disruption in the lives of our very special children. It represents a CHOICE for where these people want to work.

FEDERAL LAWS

-There are possible changes in the Fair Labor Standards Act and changes in Medicare and Medicaid that seem to be driving changes in the state. There are counties in New York and Arizona that are saying NO to these changes. We urge Ohio to do the same.

EMPLOYMENT

-The Governor's Strategic Planning Leadership Group refers to "employment" as 1 – 20 hours per week. Our son is working 28 hours a week and could work up to 35 hours a week at TAC. He also earns vacation time and sick leave.

-The Employment First initiative has not been effective in Clark County. To date 57 individuals discussed employment; 6 had job try-outs; 4 obtained jobs; 1 person was employed for 6 hours per week; 1 person for 1 day a week; one was let go. There were incidents of bullying and false accusations of misdeeds that made community employment all but impossible. All continued to supplement community employment with work at TAC. Four workers out of a workforce of 300 is pretty dismal and doesn't give us much hope for the success for Employment First in the future.

-Why would employers hire Intellectually/Developmentally Disabled workers when able-bodied workers trying to support families cannot find employment. I/DD employees may need job coaches, personal assistants, diaper changes, help with catheters? How will employers deal with behavioral outbursts? Seizures? All of these needs are met NOW by the trained, compassionate staff at TAC.

-Will Employment First Ohio offer prospective employers financial incentives to hire I/DD? At what cost to the State? Will employers be expecting the same level of productivity as other employees. That doesn't seem logical. Perhaps the money designated for incentives could be repurposed to bring community employment like bakeries, coffee shops or thrift stores into existing sheltered workshops. Bring the community to us.

TRANSPORTATION

- Currently 20 – 40 workers per bus go from home to work, then back to home. If all I/DD are employed in the community how will transportation be organized and paid for? There will be multiple shifts for hundreds or thousands of workers in each county. Most vehicles will need to be wheelchair accessible and will require trained aids to deal with behavioral and medical issues. The costs certainly would be dramatically higher than they are now.

-When weather conditions are too dangerous to run buses, county Developmental Disabilities will cancel transportation for those days. Who will be responsible for the safety of our children if the transportation model changes?

STABILITY

-David has reliable transportation, meaningful work, trained supervisors and he works with his friends. He is part of the TAC choir that performs in the local community for various events including charitable events such as The Empty Bowl Project in Champaign County. They have even performed several times in this very Statehouse!

-Employment First would have up to 2 years to find suitable employment. If TAC is closed, will our son be at home 24/7 essentially doing nothing during this period?

-The State of Ohio has recently expanded Medicaid to able-bodied recipients while over 42,000 disabled citizens are waiting on Home/Community-Based Waivers. These individuals are lacking stability in their lives.

BOTTOM LINE

-Repeating what has been said many times regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Olmstead decision: Each Intellectual or Developmentally Disabled person is entitled to treatment in the most integrated setting POSSIBLE FOR THAT PERSON. It's about CHOICE.

-We are not all the same. All I/DD cannot be treated the same. I wouldn't expect my husband to know how to run a library and you certainly wouldn't want me to write a program for your computer. If we're lucky, each of us would work with friends in a career that we liked. That makes us thrive as individuals. We are just asking the same for our son.

-This whole process reminds us of the dismantling of the mental health system in the 1980's and we're still trying to recover from that.

- Our son is part of a group of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens who often do not have advocates who can speak FOR them. We are aging parents and are reaching the point where we will need someone to take care of us. We rely on TAC to provide a productive and safe working environment for our son.

We know this is a difficult process for everyone here, but especially for you as the decision-makers. We urge you to consider our thoughts as the proposals move through the legislative process. Thank you so much for listening to our concerns.